



Down from the Mountaintop: From Belief to Belonging

Joshua Dolezal

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A lyrical coming-of-age memoir, *Down from the Mountaintop* chronicles a quest for belonging. Raised in northwestern Montana by Pentecostal homesteaders whose twenty-year experiment in subsistence living was closely tied to their faith, Joshua Doležal experienced a childhood marked equally by his parents' quest for spiritual transcendence and the surrounding Rocky Mountain landscape. Unable to fully embrace the fundamentalism of his parents, he began to search for religious experience elsewhere: in baseball, books, and weightlifting, then later in migrations to Tennessee, Nebraska, and Uruguay. Yet even as he sought to understand his place in the world, he continued to yearn for his mountain home.

For more than a decade, Doležal taught in the Midwest throughout the school year but returned to Montana and Idaho in the summers to work as a firefighter and wilderness ranger. He reveled in the life of the body and the purifying effects of isolation and nature, believing he had found transcendence. Yet his summers tied him even more to the mountain landscape, fueling his sense of exile on the plains.

It took falling in love, marrying, and starting a family in Iowa to allow Doležal to fully examine his desire for a spiritual mountaintop from which to view the world. In doing so, he undergoes a fundamental redefinition of the nature of home and belonging. He learns to accept the plains on their own terms, moving from condemnation to acceptance and from isolation to community. Coming down from the mountaintop means opening himself to relationships, grounding himself as a husband, father, and gardener who learns that where things grow, the grower also takes root.

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